

**Testimony of Philip Michalowski
President Garde Arts Center, Inc.
To The Honorable Members of the
Appropriations Committee
February 17, 2017**

Dear Senators and Representatives:

My name is Philip Michalowski. I am a charter member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) with over 45 Years of experience with municipal revitalization strategies in Connecticut cities and towns. I am also President of the Garde Arts Center in New London.

My planning experience has demonstrated to me that performing arts centers have a positive economic impact on city centers many times their direct expenditure levels. The smaller the municipal center the arts facility is located in the greater the relative positive economic multiple. This effect has long been documented in city planning journals and by academic research. When you add the quality of life and community social benefits to the economic positives, public investment in maintaining the operational viability of Connecticut's performing art centers generates high returns on the public investment and therefore makes wise public policy.

Using the Garde Arts Center as an example, the 1450 seat theater venue serves a regional population approaching 300,000. Occupying one city block in New London's small Downtown, its activity fills restaurants, hotels and parking garages; generates a stream of part-time employment across a wide range of skill sets; and consumes a range of goods and services. It is a generator of economic activity, particularly in the winter and shoulder season months when activity levels are down. Most importantly, it connects the diverse communities of Southeastern Connecticut through the arts thereby enriching our social fabric.

The State line item allocation the Garde has been receiving allows for diverse and frequent programming that serves the region. The Garde is currently struggling to absorb the State funding reductions of the past two years, These funding reductions (50%) coupled with severely diminished corporate support and other financial setbacks makes the path forward perilous.

The Garde is celebrating its 90th Anniversary this season and our goal is to reach the 100th Anniversary of serving our Region. Elimination of State line item support for Garde operations means at a minimum a severely diminished season next year and perhaps no season at all. Downtown New London's recent vitality and private investment level will surely be stifled if State support for the Garde is withdrawn. Please maintain funding at current levels.